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Relics, Places and Unwritten geographies in the work of Michel de Certeau (1925-86)

Placing de Certeau in Geography

Michel de Certeau has lately become something of a mantra in geographical writings. His name is re-cited to authorise three points. The first from urban theory, relates to planning and view from on high:

‘Seeing Manhattan from the 110th floor of the world Trade centre. beneath the haze stirred up by the winds, the urban island, a sea in the middle of the sea, lifts up the skyscrapers.... A wave of verticals. Its agitation momentarily arrested by vision. The gigantic mass is immobilized before the eyes. It is transformed into a texturology..... To what erotics of knowledge does the ecstasy of reading such a cosmos belong? Having taken voluptuous pleasure in it, I wonder what is the source of this pleasure of “seeing the whole”, of looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts.’

(1984: 91-2; reprised 1985a, 1980a)

This has keyed into a whole series of critiques of urban theory - the subject position and viewpoint of planners, the panoptic disciplining of space and the pretensions of social theory. This all comes from his essay ‘Walking in the City’. For many geographers this is the only point of contact with his work. In this first invocation, de Certeau becomes the champion of the common folk, of a street level social theory. It is in this guise that de Certeau has become a darling to some, as a counterpoint to stratospheric theory, and villain of others, as an example of taking micro-theory too far.

A second invocation takes walking in the city as an example of consumption. Indeed de Certeau invites this by putting both within a metaphor of reading. His critique of texturology from on high leads to a poetics of reader. These are his most celebratory passages about the activity of ‘making do’. In this case he uses the city as metaphor for modern life.

‘Cut loose from the traditional communities that circumscribed their functioning, they have begun to wander everywhere in a space which is becoming at once more homogeneous and more extensive. Consumers are transformed into immigrants. The system in which they move is too vast to be able to fix them in one place, but too constraining for them to ever be able to escape from it and go into exile elsewhere. There is no longer an elsewhere. And because of this, the strategic model is also transformed, as if defeated by its own success: it was by definition based on the definition of a “proper” distinct from everything else; but now that “proper” has become the whole. It could be that, little by little, it will exhaust its capacity to transform itself and constitute the only space ... the scene of Brownian movements of invisible and innumerable tactics. One would thus have a proliferation of aleatory and indeterminable manipulations within an immense framework of

socioeconomic constraints and securities: myriads of almost invisible movements, playing on the more and more refined texture of a place that is even, continuous, and constitutes a proper place for all people. Is this already the present or the future of the great city?’

(1984:40-1)

There is much here that will be developed later on. This is a figure for consumption situated in the world depicted by the Frankfurt school - a world of mass availability and control at the same time. de Certeau wants to open a space to say that our studies of technologies of power have often led us to believe their own statements of efficacy. We have missed the ‘nocturnal’ and hidden realm of use. In this he suggests we privilege writing over reading, production over consumption. A concern with the unrecognised and hidden activity of ordinary folk is the hall mark.

This cut brings us to the final general invocation of de Certeau. The power relations he analyses in terms of realms of strategy and tactics. Strategy he sees as the imposition of power through the disciplining and organisation of space. Tactics are the ‘ruses’ that take the predisposition of the world and make it over, that convert it to the purposes of ordinary people. I shall develop this later but here is de Certeau’s interest in talking about practices and events. All these invocations suggest work that begins a programme for attending to the spatial practices of people. In the language he applies to both intellectual and popular fields, he is interested in the relationships of place as a fixed position and space as a realm of practices - counterposing the fixity of the map to the practice of travelling.

Intellectual Travails and Travels

The above invocations serve as a jumping off point. But as they are currently invoked or recited they do not fully capture the breadth and richness of writings that range from sixteenth century theology to Latin American ethnology, to literary theory, to psychoanalysis to urban living. Geography has fastened rather too eagerly on only the last element of his work. I shall take this opportunity to sketch then his intellectual itinerary - or at least the traces of his passage.

Michel de Certeau was born in Chambéry in 1925. He joined the Jesuits in 1950 and was ordained in 1956 receiving a doctorate in religious science in 1960 from the Sorbonne. He became a specialist on early modern religious history and began his studies of mystics. Possibly in response to the events of 1968, he seems to have changed course. His work began to address the problems and issues of contemporary society and theory moving to deal with heterogeneous issues, and audiences. In his footnotes there is a staggering array of anthropologists, historians, writers and even references to Environment & Planning A. One might add his membership of Jacques Lacan’s Ecole Freudienne from its inception to its demise. The diversity of his writings was both product and key to his work. As Ahearne writes:

‘The extraordinary intelligence at work in his thought ... is the product of this untiring textual, cultural and interlocutory ‘travel’, coupled with a form of interior distancing or ‘quiet’ born of a life long immersion in the demanding texts of the Christian mystics’ (1995:2).

He finished his career working full-time in California from 1978 to 1984. He died in January 1986, receiving eulogies from historians like Roger Chartier, anthropologists like Marc Auge, a tribute in *Liberation* from Julia Kristeva and has been the subject of collections and special issues of journals such as *Diacritics* .

My purpose in outlining this itinerary is that it is emblematic of his project as a whole. His peripatetic intellectual wanderings need to be read as a refusal of disciplinary authority, continually destabilising boundaries. There is a hint of how he saw his intellectual practice as being an evasion of the current order of knowledge with himself and colleagues:

‘working with its machines and making use of its scraps, diverting time owed to the institution; we can make textual objects that signify an art and solidarities; we can play the game of free exchange, even if it is penalized by bosses and colleagues when they are not willing to “turn a blind eye” on it; and, in these ways, we can subvert the law that, in the scientific factory, ... progressively destroys the requirement of creation and the “obligation to give”. ... Realizing no profit (profit is produced by work done for the factory), and often at a loss, they take something from the order of knowledge in order to inscribe “artistic achievements” on it and to carve on it the graffiti of their debts of honor.’

(1984:28).

In reaction to disciplinary boundaries we find instead a variety of spatial practices and a language of thought that is truly thinking through space. I will thus follow his work from a perspective perhaps close to that of Godzich (1986:vii) in linking de Certeau with a tradition of philosophy that is sceptical to ‘the identity of thought and being’ (and by implication dialectics). I want to suggest that de Certeau’s work is an attempt to approach, or circle round ‘being’ - without reducing it to the categories of thought.

This chapter will follow this thread through his works on an ethics of knowledge, the spatiality of knowledge about the Americas, practices of knowledge and, to finish where we entered, ordinary practices in the city. Some words of caution are needed about this route. First, de Certeau himself reminds us that such theoretical narratives risk a totalizing gesture that stockpiles the prior ideas - an ‘Occidental capitalization of knowledge (1986:146). Instead this narrative is put together in what he calls a piling up of insufficiencies - a continual feeling ‘that’s not quite it’, a gesture which propels the story outwards. Second, de Certeau’s writing is very much the performance of such a dispersion (Conley 1992). As Francois Hartog summarised it:

‘He discovered, but without measuring, he travelled through, but without inhabiting, this heterological space of which he was, in a certain way, the inventor and historian, but a historian without territory, the instigator of a proceeding rather than the founder of a new discipline’

(cited Giard 1992:219)

It is almost to do a violence to his work to draw it together under a few themes. As Hartog suggests de Certeau was ‘inscribing his work in space of the other’ only then ‘to disappear in the rumour of the crowd’ (cited Giard 1992:219). Or as de Certeau put it:

‘When someone departs, the security of being *there* together, ... another time begins, made of other sorts of excursions - more secret, more abstract, or “intellectual” as one might say. These are traces of the things which we learn to seek through rational and “academic” paths, but in fact they cannot be separated from chance, from fortuitous encounters, from a kind of knowing astonishment’

(in Terdiman 1992:2)

de Certeau conceptualised his practice (and that of others) through a spatialised vocabulary. This was no mere affectation but an alertness to epistemic practices. As his early mentor Dupront put it, in his Espace et Humanisme, (1946) possession through vision ‘provides the definition of modern knowledge, whose progress is made in the reading of space... [Modern knowledge] is expressed in ... a shifting from space traversed to space that is read’ (cited Giard 1992:215). My aim is to keep this piece traversing rather than try and render visible de Certeau’s work as though on a slab.

Ethics of the Other

Godzich (1986) suggests links with the work of Emmanuel Levinas who saw thought as a response to a truth that was alien to the subject. Levinas (199?) critiqued dialectics that interiorized, colonised and mastered the unknown by placing the terrain of knowledge under the law of the Same. de Certeau’s work takes up ideas where truth is not mastery and explores the relationship or the representable and unsayable. de Certeau (1983) likens this to a philosophy sinking into the world rather than trying to dominate it so that, as in Wittgenstein, knowledge is of a kind with ordinary speech acts and language games rather than standing over them. Thus philosophical discourse is haunted by an exteriority that has a (necessary and fortunate) quality of being unfinished leaving wounds the text. The philosophy does not dominate its object. It is seized by what it speaks of (1983:26). So, for instance, vision becomes an opening to being other, a general field of desire and differentiation in which twining and folding relationships between objects are played out.

The relationship to the Other is a central concern thus in his thought as well as his substantive topics. 'It is not certain that de Certeau thought such a "science of the Other" to be constructible; rather it constituted a horizon of intelligibility toward which his work addressed itself in its entirety' (Giard 1992:217). Louis Marin put it more poetically that 'the other is always subject to a kind of Cheshire cat devolution or disappearance.. this necessary horizon of communicative loss' (in Terdiman 1992:4). The mark of a perturbation or rupture as a necessary part of thinking about practices, as a mark of heterology, is a theme in his work. He explored what has to be forgotten to make things intelligible, the survivals of other ways of thinking that creep in as 'lapses in the syntax created by the law of place' where 'they symbolize a return of the repressed, that is, a return of what, at a given moment, has *become* unthinkable in order for a new identity to *become* thinkable' (1988:94). He saw the 'place of knowledge' as under the logic of the Same, where things were rendered transparent, intelligible and visible (1988:333). A place, where everything is spread out before the gaze of theory, and differentiated only by location relative to each other (1987; Castoriadis 1987:201). Wary that science, 'by substituting its own places for the complex geography of social ruses and its "artificial" languages for ordinary language, has allowed and even required reason to adopt a logic of mastery and transparency' (1984:22) he wrote so as to interrogate each figure without creating a stable centre. Thus we have a thought never in repose but constructed through itinerancy; a Freudian reading of texts as what they bring forth (Giard 1992:218).

In this light he likened sixteenth and seventeenth century mystics to the statues on the boundary of an ancient Greek city, marking what is unknowable (1992b:2). Mysticism was the visible performance of contact with the unspeakable, inconceivable Absolute (1992a:14). Mysticism opens up a sense of a beyond (in this case the unfathomable essence of the universe); it opens up an itinerary (1992a:19). Mystical knowledge offers a way of thinking that in place of dominating physically welcomes the repressed element of the other (1992b:47). A parallel is Bosch's painting the Garden of Earthly Delights, where '[t]he secret of *the Garden* is to *make you believe* that it possesses some sayable secret' (1992b:52). Bosch's figures suggest visible but unreadable stories. It plays on our need to decipher, to find hidden schemes; the placing of elements provokes a speculation on the logic linking them (Conley 1992).

Spatial encounter, spatial history

A concern with how the unrepresentable punctures symbolic systems is not surprising given de Certeau's Lacanian background. Yet this is a profoundly historicised and spatialised version of Lacan. I shall outline the historical inflection before looking at the geographical imagination. The historicisation is a twofold inflection, not just the chronology expected of a writer who ranges from mediaeval to contemporary. The first inflection is the articulation of the difference of psychoanalytic and historiographic temporalities. In Historiography time is a sequence in which the past is absolutely and irrevocably distinct. In the Freudian imaginary, by contrast, it is as though each of Rome's spatial configurations remained intact and interpenetrated the others (1992b:65). If for Lacan the unconscious is

structured like a language, for de Certeau language is structured like a city. The second inflection comes out of the historian acting in the present, through specific present things (archives, monuments), to reconstruct a past time leaving a constitutive split. History is poised between fictions of the past and claims of an authority based on present practice (Poster 1992).

Spatial practices are equally bound up in an economy of representation and difference. This comes through most obviously at two levels; first, the substantive focus on encounters between spatially separated cultures; second, the economy of representation itself is worked through in spatial terms. In fact a bold reading would suggest that the encounters with the new world were merely one part of this wider economy. Certainly one could find statements to support that, yet I think it misses the way de Certeau worked -- historically embedded examples are chosen as prototypical points in the evolution of practices. de Certeau was no idealist. For him '[t]he world of objects is there, terribly "real" in resisting human modification' (Conley 1988:xvii). But contrary to many materialisms, the objects are quite the opposite of empirically self-evident. Their irreducible 'thinginess' renders them resistant to representation. They can never be fully captured, and appear as limits or gaps that elicit ever more erudition. Echoing Lacan, the real is what is problematic in discourse, not what is self-evident. There is no invariable model. Choosing moments of crisis and change was a matter of highlighting the changing representational systems - and the practices through which we now view past worlds in their full strangeness. Each stands thus at the tension of current systems of intelligibility and those which sustained them then/there.

The Writing of History starts with the allegorical etching of Amerigo Vespucci encountering America (1625). A spatial juxtaposition where:

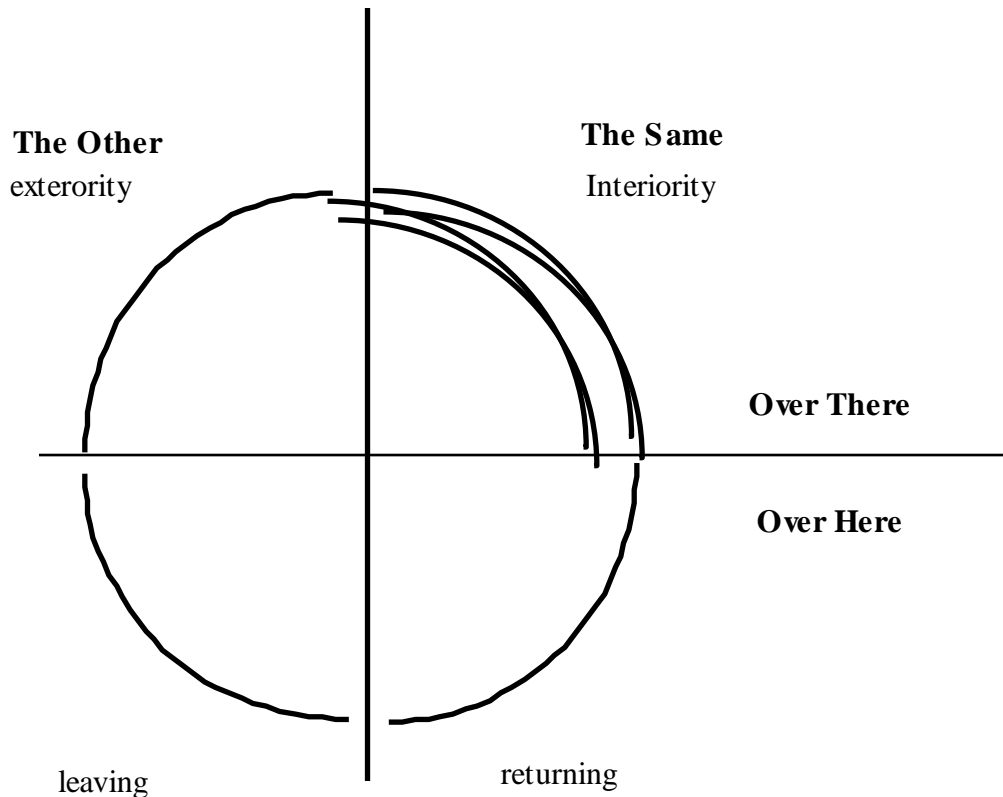
'Amerigo Vespucci the voyager arrives from the sea. A crusader standing erect, his body in armor, he bears the European weapons of meaning. Behind him are the vessels that will bring back to the European West the spoils of a paradise. Before him is the Indian "America", a nude woman reclining in her hammock, an unnamed presence of difference, a body which awakens within a space of exotic flora and fauna.. An inaugural scene: after a moment of stupor, on this threshold dotted with colonnades of trees, the conqueror will write the body of the other and trace there his own history.' (1988:xxv)

This space and time of contact should not be taken as a generic model. The scene is counterpointed in his reading of another frontispiece etching of a century later- this time on the works of Lafitau (1980b) - of a study in the west, the 'muse' once more is female, the scattered artefacts of ancient places and new worlds lie about the writer. Here the broken images form a landscape of ruins. The study is a thinking laboratory where the ruins are teased into timeless ethnological theory. Time disappears from theory yet peeks through in these artefacts. The time of contact forms the repressed context of theory. 'The law of producing a text on the site of ruins imposes itself. Henceforth it will be necessary to create writing with the debris of the Other.' (1980b:50).

Between these two allegorical places, there is a tension. The time of co-living with hosts tends to sink into oblivion in the time of writing and intellectual profit (de Certeau 1986:25). Yet not total oblivion. Neither space can be sealed from the other, the place of writing is 'constantly altered by the inaccessible (t)exterior [hors-texte] which authorizes that writing' (1986:69) the trace of each inside the other creates a gap. A gap that calls forth a narrative. The texts create a series of surprises and intervals (classically voyages) that substantiate the alterity of the savage and thus authorise speech. The ahistorical descriptions of peoples are framed by these meta-discursive spatial practices. For instance Montaigne's texts, like the ars memoriae, work by placing things with the assumption that there is a stable topography with a place for every figure (1986:70; cf Yates 1968, Carruthers 1990). Yet this is a precarious achievement, since the tale is structured around three sorts of accounts, each of which shows the gaps in the others - the common sense reaction lacks reasoning, the ancients lacked knowledge and contemporary accounts were too often untrustworthy. It creates a negativity at its centre.

The ways difference fractured the space of western thought was crucial to de Certeau. It takes us beyond binary inversions or stable oppositions, like primitive versus civilised. The topology is more complex than this. So while the western text manufactures time and reason, in contrast to a space 'over there' that forms a place for pleasure, the effect of this is to make pleasure the unsayable remainder of the inexpressible primitive (1988:227). The figure of leisure and desire leaves a trace of pleasure, a profit brought back from the Other. These practices form an unsayable, unlocalisable kernel that is written around - a process of circum-scription.

The writing of Jean de Lery (1578) serves to spatialise cultures as a synchronic picture (1988:205). The description of the Other is characterised 'not by localizations or geographical routes .. but by a taxonomy of living beings' (1988:226). However, the structure of the account works to divide Alterity and the Same and also 'over there' and 'over here' as spatial categories (fig 1). This forms a double location in theory and in practice since here/there and Same/Other forms different axes. Thus the space of 'over here' anticipates the Other as the ethnographer sets out , while 'over there' is marked by introflexion and a created sense of interiority. Narrative happens 'back here', while 'over there' is characterised by static description; the practice of the travel, represented in the detailed log, opposes a space of objects.



The voyage is transformed into a cycle which creates a centre of knowledge, a place of accumulation which fixes the other in place. The writings form a technology invading space and capitalising time (1988:216). Writing is an operation organised around a centre. This accumulation is premised on speaking in the name of the Other. This absence drives narratives onwards to try and fill it, yet they only reinscribe the loss. In later accounts we still see this process, so in Jules Verne's travel story of 10,000 Leagues Under the Sea, the narrator works in the library of the fabulous submarine. In so doing Verne narrates, in a displaced form, the researcher, Marcel, he employed to scour libraries for eighteenth century sources (1986:140). The effect is an unfurling sequence of writing and voyage where both Marcel and Verne labour on other texts then bury them in their own. The effect is of fragments piled up, of citations of citations and ruins of ruins so:

‘the narrative displays a multiplication of trajectories, which unfurl an earlier writing in space, and of documents, which bury the past beneath displacements of location. But all of this occurs in the same place, in a book, or rather collection of books, each of which, due to its particular geography, is different from the preceding one, in other words stands *beside* the other, yet nevertheless repeats the same depth effect by placing itself *above* or *below* the other.’ (1986:143)

This depth effect is the accumulatory economy. Through the citations and endless erudition of naming places Verne is working to textualise space, to make ‘spatial history’ (Carter 1987). Different epochs are marked by different

relationships of time and space in texts and their practices - a double modality of textuality and geography (Giard 1992:213). Mediaeval hagiographies, the lives of saints, provide a geography of the sacred, with the places where events occur but not the time - since their temporality is that of the cycle of calendar and festival. The itinerant reader is led to the named place of the saint (1988:280-2). Conley (1996) looked at cartographic and literary practices in early modern France to chart the changing shape of the individual. Literature appealed to mapping to create new forms for new ideas of self and subject. The 'view shifts from one of the microcosmic self as mirror of the macrocosmic world to one in which both the reader and the characters discover that every figure counts as an insular entity among thousands of others' (Conley 1996:177). This latter singularisation goes with a depiction of self against unknown and fragmented descriptions with travels between instances. The total scheme of the global cosmography is replaced by knowledge organised around the places of islands. This moment is the start of a split of map and travel stories (Conley 1996:193-7).

The relationship of map to story is a key part of this analysis. The map-and the list make knowledge as a field of equivalent points (1987). By contrast narratives are about motion. The fractures in narratives create routes from idea to episode in a spatio-temporal practice (cf. Sieburth 1987). This suggests a role for stories that is not about emplacing things but rather creating a theatre of frontiers and interactions, about the deformation rather than topical definition of places. Narrative is a relationship between structure and events comprising a topography and its alteration by otherness. Otherness introduces temporality so that '[e]very play or story is the progressive transformation of a spatial order into a temporal series' (1986:22-3).

Otherness puncturing narrative wholeness is a modified working of Lacanian ideas of desire and lack -- a performativity structured around absences -- while the spatialised approach leads back to Lacan's seminars on a 'general theory of space for thinking out language' (1986:49). So writing 'with no other ties than these forest of signs, these symbols of absence and, as the kaballah put it, these letters, initiating other encounters and other spaces. These are icons of what one begins to understand might still be said resembling the "angels" which have become nothing more than a manner of speaking.' (de Certeau in Terdiman 1992:2) These ideas seem prescient of the imaginative geographies depicted by Said (1978). However, they take writing and knowledge as spatial practices rather than representational systems. This echoes work currently being done by writers such as Michel Serres (1982,1995). The idea of displacement, and working through materials as properties that may be rearranged but not appropriated, has already found a ready audience in post-colonial writing (Dhareshwar 1989:153).

The Practices and Places of Knowledge

I have thus far introduced some ideas of his practice as a mobile engagement itself. This section will clarify how he saw science as spatial practice. Like many current commentators he reinserted academic studies in their social context - including the position of enunciation as well as the enunciated. This opens up fairly obvious avenues to

look at the authority mechanisms through which speech is credentialised (1985b). Taking this further, the reality effects are often necessarily dependent on obscuring the practices that created them, so that '[r]epresentations are authorized to speak in the name of the "real" only if they are successful in obliterating any memory of the conditions under which they were produced' (1988:208). As a practice organising notes, producing sources and making them into a collection exiles them from practice and makes them objects of representational knowledge. Most research now is about producing 'useful lacunae' (1988:72-8). So science works on practices by anticipating them 'within that grid of hypotheses and models which will 'make them speak', its battery of questions, like so many hunters' traps, transforming the silence of things into answers, into language' (1980:22).

Thus he suggested Foucault too often set up traps for the world in advance, so after initial surprise, a stimulus of heteronomy, the world becomes remarkably ordered again -- leaving practices 'the black sun of theory'. A rhetoric of clarity, where one thing is cut out and turned upside down to reveal everything else, makes the theoretical stance almost panoptical in itself (1984:44-8, 1986:187-91). The choice of structures focuses on regularities still, not the 'scattered polytheism' of relic systems of thought, on dominant models of the episteme not the continued performance of other practices. This awareness of how the tools of theory operate marked his understanding of all cultural studies:

'to outline the functioning of a cultural aggregate, to make its laws visible, to hear its silences, to structure a landscape that is nothing if it is not more than a simple reflection. But it would be wrong to think that these tools are neutral, or their gaze inert: nothing gives itself up, everything has to be seized, and the same interpretive violence can either create or destroy'. (1986:135).

We must recognise the guiles of theory without then moving from seeing them as transparent to seeing them totally obviating the outside world. de Certeau related the fields of practices and theories while, like Wittgenstein, admitting 'we are foreigners on the inside - but there is no outside' (1984:13-14).

Practices are often treated as either inert contents or empty structures (Brammer 1992). This reveals only the 'Beauty of the dead' where theory communicates with cadavers (1986:20-1). This stance de Certeau linked with the creation of locus propria or propres of knowledge. These are places that allow vision to present a localisable object. 'Our society is characterized by a cancerous growth of vision, measuring everything by its ability to show or be shown and transmuting communication into a visual journey. It is a sort of epic of the eye and the impulse to read.' (1984:xxi) The propre creates objects through transforming the uncertainties of history into readable spaces (1984:36). The propre is the 'mastery of time through the foundation of an autonomous place'; place is antagonistic to time. It is autonomous of the practices that create it, and thus atemporal. If we return to the opening analysis of the city where representational art and science 'immobilize its opaque mobility in a transparent text' through a 'no-when' synchronic system flattening all readings into one plane of data (1984:94) and the 'empire of the evident' (1984:204).

This proper vision of the 'concept city' is in decay de Certeau is relieved to note. He refuses to be worried about the decline of grand visions, suggesting '[t]he ministers of knowledge have always assumed that the whole universe was threatened by the very changes that affected their ideologies and positions. They transmute the misfortune of their theories into theories of misfortune' (1984:95). The inability of these theoretical fictions to apprehend practices he likens to 'a comedy of mourning in the tomb of the absent' (1984:157) - like time geographies of routes which refer to what has gone by not the act itself of passing by. The agenda he sets emphasises the plurality of practices - not comprising a series but an innumerable mass of singularities. These are the ruins of non-hegemonic systems, that form the raw material worked on by theories. The dispersed knowledges of practices elude the gaze of theory. Science won't eventually make princesses of all these Cinderellas (1984:67). Instead he seeks a mode of knowledge through travel to open space to difference, since stories about places are makeshift things, composed of the world's debris (1984:107). They have no place of their own but move in the territory of the other (1986:202). We can note then that de Certeau has a tension between a knowledge that wishes to make things legible by placing them and illegible practices that move over those places with a relationship of absolute difference between them. These are very fixed positions with a monolithic view of knowledge rather like Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) 'Royal Science'. It might be argued it leaves the popular only as existing as it is marked through its exclusion - without a positivity of its own. The popular is only visible through the lens of theory which cannot see the life but only the dead objects ripped out of a living culture (1986, Frow 1991, Schirato 1993).

Practices and tactics.

de Certeau comes dangerously close to seeing the popular as a remainder defined by exclusion from proper knowledge. There are some defences on this charge, but principally I think we can reply that he does mean this as a political exhortation not simply an empirical statement (Kinser 1992). His concern is how science is being applied to the world. A concern that carries echoes of Weber, the Frankfurt school and humanistic geography. de Certeau sketches the fear of a system of knowledge expanding all the time. His answer is the giant order is both vast yet also strangely tenuous when set against the maritime immensity of scattered practices - the city is an 'order-sieve' (1984:143). The gaze of power transfixes objects but also thus becomes blind to a vast array of things that do not fit its categories. We might note that there is an almost nostalgic feel for a western European mode of urbanity in his writing (Kinser 1992). Equally the focus on grand power, on totalisation, means a view of power as singular with no mediating levels.

Control of space is a matter of strategy which is orientated through the construction of proper knowledge. In contrast, there are tactics - the arts of making do, like reading, or cooking - which use what is there in multiple permutations. This practical knowledge of the city transforms and crosses spaces, creates new links (metonymy rather than metaphor), comprising mobile geography of looks and glances. A crucial well spring is memory. It forms an anti-museum, which does not catalogue and place events, but takes fragments and propels them into the present. Time

introduces alterity to space through the sudden deployment of memories. This is ‘ “Memory”, in the ancient sense of the term, which designates a presence to the plurality of times and is thus not limited to the past’ (1984:82n7). The alterity is that these memories contain not just events, but still carry the remains of different conceptual systems from whence they came. These then are the ghosts in the machine. Walking is to create non-sites and haunted geographies.

de Certeau comes close to unproblematically valorising tactics though. This leaves questions about the multiply inflected politics of urban life - is a gang tagging its territory constructing proper space - probably; is then a drive by shooting to be regarded as a tactic and ruse to be applauded? I would suggest the vision of power is not meant to be directly transposed onto urban institutions. The singular vision of power is related to Lacanian ideas of the Law of the Name of the Father as controlling and classifying. The idea of lack, absence, the role of vision and non-place seem a spatial and urban metaphor for psychoanalytic ideas of language. Language becomes city. But not simply landscape becoming text - de Certeau saw textuology and reading the city as complicit in the strategies of power. Rather the city becomes an arena of stories - once more narrative offers the inclusion of alterity. A theory of narration is indissoluble from practices, where narration proceeds by way of coups and detours by way of the past and quotation in the sudden opportunistic connections from memories (1984 78-9; 1986:192). ‘The verbal relics of which narrative is made up (fragments of forgotten stories and opaque gestures) are juxtaposed in a collage in which their relationships are not thought out and therefore form a symbolic whole. They are articulated by lacunae.’ (1984:143) Stories are not about movement, but make movements, not objects but effects, they transform, they do exactly what they say they do. This is very much the Greek metis as a logic immersed in practices. These stories mobilise memories that profit from the order without creating their own; they use occasions not create them; they bring invisible geographies into contact with the ordered realm of the rational.

The model is not then grammar but reading, narrating and speaking. Where ‘pedestrian utterances’ speak the city, through metonymic tricks such as synecdoche and asyndeton the space of the city expands and contracts. Through the way thinking of one place brings in another, speaking the city can make wild temporal and spatial leaps - sudden connections and shifts. de Certeau used the term trajectory (1984:33) to suggest that no matter what place we were in our orientation meant our space pointed to and from elsewhere - not as points on a sequence but immanent in each point. Trajectory suggests a temporal movement through space, that is, the unity of a diachronic succession of points through which it passes. In this sense comes the famous tag-line that space is practised place (1984:117). Spatial transformation is mediated via memory.

For one who is often labelled as a high priest of agency centred accounts of the city this leaves an unusual vision of the subject and agent. Firstly it is an agent constituted against a monolithic vision of power - a socio-psychological version of modernity. de Certeau believed totalities exist as real tendencies and projects, even if he did not think they would ever succeed totally. His vision is replete with structures. It is not an agency free for all. But secondly, his subject is informed by psychoanalysis. The role of alterity and the idea of heterology have been carried from encountering the other to encountering daily life. The subject, calling up memories to act is ‘constructed as the

stratification of heterogeneous moments' and this form of time results in 'the impossibility of an identity fixed by place' (1986:218). It is his insistence on the roles of particular places and paths which gives the spatial grid defining people's memories and imagination an independent heuristic value, as a topic in its own right, beyond the abstractions of social systems on the one hand and the empiricism of tracing individual behaviour on the other (Kinser 1992). Poster (1922:102) comments it offers a vision of a subject that neither recreates the unity of liberal theories nor evaporates the possibility of agency. The work on the city suggests instead:

'A piling up of heterogeneous places. Each one, like the deteriorating page of a book, refers to a different mode of territorial unity, of socioeconomic distribution, of political conflicts and of identifying symbolism' // 'The whole, made up of pieces that are not contemporary and still linked to totalities that have fallen into ruins..' (1984:201)

This then corresponds to a vision of subjectivity that is equally open, where "what is memorable is what we can dream about a site. In any palimpsestic site, subjectivity is already articulated on the absence that structures it like existence.' (1984:144).

A Letter Returned

Michel de Certeau was a complex and fascinating thinker. His work looks to the proliferation of meanings but through his spatialised language he manages to keep hold of a context of power that is too easy to lose. His focus on modalities of use offers a sense of agency which has chimed with, and contributed to, rethinking from historical studies (Chartier 1987), to cultural studies (Frow 1991, Poster 1992) and geography. The agent is linked to an aporia or limit to knowledge; a non-discursive kernel not symbolized in language. Knowledge of practices is 'thus a mark in place of acts, a relic in place of performances: it is only their remainder, the sign of their erasure.' (1984:35). He begins to provide a theory of practice where alterity is a pluralizing element. His emphasis on the role of narration and on the spatiality of that process, his spatial stories, remains a novel contribution. It certainly takes us beyond the reductions of his work to an account of agency or tactical use of the city. In reading his work, I am reminded most often of the way he described Michel Foucault, suggesting that he writes brilliantly - a little too brilliantly, leaving the reader trying to recall what it was that won them over. Of his academic practice and the assembly of material the comment that he was a 'dancer disguised as an archivist' (1984:80) also seems to say a lot about de Certeau.

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